



Revenge of the Bully (How to Beat the Bully)

By Scott Starkey

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Rodney Rathbone must protect his reputation as a reluctant hero when he takes on team sports—and a football bully—in this laugh-out-loud follow-up to *How to Beat the Bully Without Really Trying* and *Call of the Bully*.

When Rodney Rathbone tries out for his school football team, the outcome is incredible: he isn't cut! His father is thrilled, but Rodney isn't. Before long, Rodney starts to wonder, is it more difficult to make the team—or stay on it? Especially since his arch-nemesis is now technically his teammate, and he seems ready to show Rodney who's boss. And Rodney's mother is now the restaurant reviewer for one local paper and Rodney has to go along—escargot anyone? Reluctant hero Rodney Rathbone is back in school trying to live up to his fame. Can he?

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Scott Starkey is author of *How to Beat the Bully Without Really Trying*, *The Call of the Bully*, and *Revenge of the Bully*. A longtime elementary school teacher, Starkey is passionate about helping reluctant readers and lectures on the subject. He lives with his wife and three children in Long Island, New York. Visit him at ScottStarkeyBooks.com.

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Revenge of the Bully

Chapter 1

WELCOME TO MIDDLE SCHOOL

The front doors of Garrettsville Middle School loomed before me. I paused and tried to swallow but my mouth was too dry. I had been so nervous about starting middle school that I had missed the bus. What a morning. I watched my dad drive off and forced my legs forward, slowly. I made it to the first step. . . .

“Yo, Rodney!”

I turned to my right. Rishi was weaving between students, almost slamming into a bike rack as he rushed toward me. We were best friends and this was the first time I was seeing him since returning from summer camp over the weekend.

“How was it?” he yelled before even reaching me. Without waiting for my response, he continued, “My summer was great. I’m going to tell you everything that happened. On the first day of summer I couldn’t find my shoes, right? So I went outside barefoot. Do you know what happened next? You know my neighbor’s dog, Boris? Real big, right? Do you know what real big dogs leave on the lawn? You guessed it. I stepped in a big pile of—”

“Rodney,” someone interrupted, “whadya do this summer?”

I looked to my left. It was Josh, legendary school bully turned unlikely summer-camp friend. Even though I was standing on the first step, he towered over me wearing that confused expression that came so easy to him.

“Uh, I went to Camp Wy-Mee,” I answered. “Remember? You were there.” I thought I saw some recognition in his eyes. Either that or he was focusing on a big late-summer fly that buzzed by.

Rishi knew nothing of Josh and my recent relationship breakthroughs. After all, Josh and his evil sidekick, Toby, had spent every day at Baber Elementary threatening me last year. It was only at summer camp—without Toby by his side—that Josh and I had actually hit it off. Not knowing this, Rishi continued, “Hey Josh, I thought Rodney got you sent to military school. Escape already?”

Great. Rishi was doing what he does best . . . getting me into hot water. Before I could explain that Josh’s parents had decided against military school, I spotted a face coming our way that I hadn’t seen in over two

months. It was still as beady-eyed and ugly as ever. Toby walked over and whacked Josh on the shoulder. “Ready to give Rathbone a first-day-of-school beating?”

Josh was indeed ready for something. His eyes narrowed below his big forehead. I’d seen that look before. He was about to charge! My stomach gurgled. Would he fall back under Toby’s control? Was I about to get crushed in the next few seconds?

Again Toby whacked Josh’s shoulder. “Come on, big guy. I know you’re just itchin’ to pound someone. Who’s the most annoying kid in the world?” Toby looked in my direction and smiled his crafty sneer. “I know how badly you want to unleash some pain, Josh, so go on. Do it!” For added emphasis, he poked him in the chest.

“Raaaaagghhhhhhhhh!”

I flinched as Josh exploded, but instead of me, he grabbed Toby by the shoulders and spun him halfway around before hurling him through the air. The whole thing took about a second.

“Awesome!” Rishi hollered as Toby landed in a bush.

“Did you see him fly, Rodney?” Josh asked, grinning.

“Yeah, Josh, he flew.”

“Like a birdie!” Josh clapped his hands together.

“Listen, Rishi,” I whispered as we watched Toby fumble about in the bush, “Josh and I became buddies at camp. You know? In other words, he’s not our enemy anymore.”

I thought this might surprise Rishi but he accepted the news as if it was nothing. “Nice.”

“What’s going on out here?” a deep voice demanded. The three of us looked up. A big man stood above us gnawing on a pen. He wore a black baseball cap and black collared shirt, both covered in gold letters that spelled G-MEN FOOTBALL. “Did you just throw that kid into the bush?” he asked Josh, plucking the pen from his mouth and using it to point at Toby.

I was nervous about the big kids in middle school and didn’t want my new bodyguard expelled before we even got inside the building. I tried to come up with an excuse. Josh, however, beat me to it. “Yeah, I chucked him! Wasn’t that cool?”

Ughhh. This was it. Josh was a goner.

Mr. Football was still looking at the bush and I cringed as he opened his mouth. “That has to be over ten feet away.” He looked back at Josh and a slight smile touched his mouth. “Let me see your muscles, son.” Josh flexed his biceps. “Holy smokes! What do you have in those arms, grapefruits? Man, they could be cantaloupes!” Now his smile stretched from ear to ear. He wedged the pen back in his mouth. “You got to be the toughest-looking kid I’ve ever seen.”

“He’s even tougher,” Rishi said, pointing at me.

“Phtttt!” The pen flew out of the guy’s mouth and hit me in the forehead. “This . . . um . . . student is tougher than him?” he asked Rishi.

“And faster, too.” Rishi grinned. I was ready to clobber him on the head.

“Fast and tough. Can’t teach speed!” The guy clapped his hands together and looked at the sky. “Ohhhh. This could finally be the year we beat Windham! What are your names, boys?”

“Rodney and Josh,” I answered.

“No. Tell me your full names.”

Rishi stepped in again. “Allow me to introduce you to the one and only Rodney Rathbone and Josh Dumbrowski.”

“Rathbone and Dumbrowski,” he growled. “Dumbrowski and Rathbone. Now those are football names! Boys, I’m Coach Laimbardi. I’ve been looking for players like you.”

He’d been looking for us? Why couldn’t I just walk in through the front door like everyone else? I’d just finished an insane school year followed by an even crazier summer. I wanted peace and quiet . . . a nice life. I pictured a little cottage in the country by a secluded lake with birds circling overhead. I could get a dog. I’d name him Sam and he’d sit by my side in the evenings while I played harmonica on the front porch. . . .

“Dumbrowski!” the coach barked. My cabin vanished. “You ever play fullback?”

Josh gave his usual response. “Duhhhh.”

Coach Laimbardi clarified it for him. “Can you hit?”

“I CAN HIT!” Josh shouted back.

“That’s good, because a fullback does a lot of hitting.”

Josh grinned. “A lot of hitting? School’s gonna be even better than camp, right, Rodney?” Well, at least he’d remembered where he’d been the last seven weeks.

I couldn’t answer, though. I was too busy trying to come up with an excuse for why I couldn’t be on the team. Before I could think of something—I’m allergic to getting crushed?—Rishi grabbed my shoulder and the coach’s attention.

“Now take a good look at this one. Give Rathbone the ball and you’ll win every game.”

Nothing like added pressure on the first day of school. I enjoyed playing football with my friends but playing on a real team against a bunch of guys twice my size wasn’t my idea of fun. Why couldn’t the captain of the chess team have seen Josh toss Toby? Unfortunately, it was Coach Laimbardi, and judging from the look on his face, Rishi’s buildup of me was getting to him.

“Yeah, I think you’re right,” the coach answered slowly. “I can see the headline of the Weekly Villager now. ‘Rathbone Rumbles for 100 Yards.’ Looks like I got a new tailback. Of course last year’s starter, Trevor

Tarantola, he's not going to like it. No matter, tough kid like you no doubt relishes a little heated competition. Isn't that right?"

All I relished was to be home hiding under the covers.

Coach Laimbardi clapped his hands. "All right, boys. Practice starts tomorrow. I'll see you two in full pads at three p.m. sharp." He walked off mumbling something about beating Windham.

"Awesome," Rishi exclaimed. "You're the new starting running back!"

My head was spinning. If things weren't bad enough, what happened next sealed my fate. Toby, who had crawled out of the bush covered in dirt and leaves, growled, "Yeah, definitely awesome. I can't wait to see what my big brother, Trevor, and his buddies on the football team do to you."

I watched him limp off. How had this happened so quickly? I'd gone from chicken to dead duck in a matter of seconds. Rishi elbowed me. "We haven't even walked in the front doors yet and we got to see Toby go for a ride." He wore a gigantic grin. "Even better, you just took his older brother's starting spot on the football team. Nothing like beginning the school year with a bang!"

I wanted to tell him I preferred starting with a whimper but I kept my mouth shut. We were entering the building and I needed to concentrate on not getting lost. Rishi and I said, "See you later," and split up in search of our lockers. My stomach was in a knot as I walked the strange hallways but a few kids I knew from Baber Intermediate said hi and I began to relax. By the time I found my homeroom I was feeling better—until I saw who was placed next to me. It shouldn't have been a surprise, since homerooms were arranged alphabetically.

As I sat down at my desk, Kayla Radisson's voice sliced into my ears. "I heard you had a big summer."

I glanced over. It's kind of interesting seeing faces after a few months. She looked different. Maybe she had changed her hair or something. One thing was the same, though. Her face still wore its usual nasty expression.

I stared at her without responding because I really didn't know what to say. Kayla was best friends with Jessica, who I hoped was still my girlfriend. I was afraid I had ruined the relationship because of something that happened at camp. Impatient as always, Kayla demanded, "So how many girlfriends do you have now?"

"One."

"If you're referring to Jessica, the answer is none. Back in June I told her you weren't worth waiting for all summer. She could have dated any number of better-looking guys than you, but no, 'Rodney this and Rodney that,' and the whole time you're off at camp having a great old time chasing every girl you see."

"That's not true at all!" I told her. "I didn't chase anybody."

"Want to know what I'd do to you if you were my boyfriend?"

"Not really," I said with a shiver.

She scowled and wagged her finger in my face before stopping it an inch from my nose. "Watch it!"

I was about to defend myself again but thought it best to keep silent. Satisfied that I was “watching it,” Kayla lowered her finger and continued. “Now, like I said, I warned her. I was like . . .”

She went on for a bit more before our homeroom teacher thankfully interrupted us with attendance.

This wasn't good. Kayla only confirmed what I already feared—that I had probably lost Jessica. I shook my head. I still couldn't believe the bizarre turn of events on my last day of summer camp. Jessica, perhaps the best-looking girl I knew, had been brought along by my parents as a happy surprise for me. We hadn't seen each other since the day I asked her out at the end of the school year. When she spotted me at camp she ran right toward me to give me a hug. I can still picture her long blond hair blowing in the breeze, her arms outstretched as her eyes smiled into mine.

I'd love to pause the image forever, but I can't. The image always moves on to the next moment when Jessica clunked heads with Tabitha and Alison, two girls I knew from camp who were also running toward me. Turns out all three claimed to be my girlfriend that day. Jessica rode the whole way home in my parents' car with her arms folded staring out the window. She didn't speak to me then and still wasn't speaking to me, even though I tried calling her a few times. . . .

“You there!”

I jumped, startled. “Me?”

The homeroom teacher sat at her desk before an empty classroom. “It's Rathbone, isn't it? Are you waiting for an invitation? The bell rang. Go to first period. Go on. Go!” I had been so lost in thought I hadn't even noticed.

The hallway was jammed and very different from elementary school, where my former teacher, Mrs. Lutzkraut, had insisted that we walk in silent, orderly lines. Here, kids were everywhere, all talking and laughing and moving. It was chaos and I was bumped and jostled so many times that I wondered if I was already at football practice. I had history first period, Spanish second period, and math third—and of course none of the classes were near my locker. I tucked some notebooks under my arm and squeezed past the big bodies and unfamiliar faces.

I found a stairwell that led up to the second floor and down to the basement. It was also crowded. I could tell by the way everyone smiled and joked around that they knew each other. Meanwhile, I was still pretty new to Garrettsville and felt like a complete stranger—until I spotted a vision coming down the stairs. Maybe it was my imagination but the loud voices seemed to go silent as Jessica approached. I saw some older boys looking at her and elbowing each other. I knew this was a chance for me to fix things.

Then she saw me.

Her eyes hardened, but at least she didn't run away screaming. It was now or never. “Hi,” I said. “I hoped I'd see you.”

“Well, now you've seen me. Do you mind moving?” she asked, sounding scarily like Kayla. “I don't want to be late.”

“Jessica, just give me a second. I know what happened the other day looked terrible, but I wasn't dating those two girls. . . .”

She rolled her eyes, again reminding me of Kayla. This was getting spooky. “Listen,” I continued, “I think those girls were impressed that I saved Camp Wy-Mee. Seriously, I dreamed of you the whole time I was away!”

Her eyes lost a little of their glare and I began to see the real Jessica returning. “That was the worst moment of my life,” she said.

“I can imagine. I am so sorry. I wish it never happened, but I promise you, you’re the only girl that I—”

“That’s him!” a girl yelled excitedly.

“There he is!” Another girl giggled.

Three girls in matching black tank tops and gold skirts looked my way. “It is him!” the third girl gushed. I glanced over my shoulder expecting to see some famous singer but grew alarmed when I realized they were definitely talking about me. The one in the middle, who was slightly taller than the other two, and much taller than me, stepped forward.

“We heard all about you. This is Sarah and Mindy. I’m Josie, captain of the cheerleaders, and I heard you’re our new starting running back.”

“Ummmm,” I mumbled.

“He’s a little cutey,” Mindy said.

Josie pinched my cheek. “I like running backs.”

I began to wheeze.

“We’ll see you around,” Josie said, smiling and giving me a wink.

I watched them walk up the stairs. “What were we talking about?” I asked Jessica.

“I can’t imagine what I ever saw in you! You’re horrible.”

“But Jessica, I don’t know them. They—”

“Leave me alone, Rodney.” She whipped out of the stairwell into the crazed corridor. I gulped down a feeling of sorrow. The day had barely begun and I had hit rock bottom.

“Crack!”

I felt a jarring sensation in my arm as my new notebooks flew into the air. They smashed against the banister and the loose-leaf paper exploded. I should never underestimate just how low rock bottom can get. A slick voice behind me yelled, “Fumble!” followed by a round of laughs.

I wasn’t eager to see who had knocked the books from my arm and for a moment I watched some of the paper float down to the basement. Reluctantly, I turned around. Five or six big guys were laughing at me. One of them stepped forward. “A running back needs to hold on to the ball.” I wondered how everyone knew

about my new football career already. I took a better look at the guy talking and swallowed down my breakfast. I was looking at a bigger, nastier version of a face I'd come to know and despise.

I didn't really need the introduction but got it anyway. "I think you know my little brother, Toby." He jerked his thumb behind his back. Toby stood there smiling. "I'm Trevor. Starting running back. I hear you've come to take my spot."

Not wanting to give him any extra reason to dislike me, I said, "Me? No. I've always kind of pictured myself sitting comfortably on the bench. You know, come to think of it, I'm actually quite gifted at filling water jugs. I'm sure that—"

Trevor's smile vanished and his hands closed on my shirt. "Stop talking. You think I don't know all about you, Rathbone? You think my runty brother here hasn't been begging me to hunt you down and pulverize you for months?"

"Uhh."

"Truth is, I never listen to the annoying shrimp. . . ." Toby's smile turned to a scowl but I was too preoccupied to enjoy it. His monster brother continued, "Now I see what he's been talkin' about. You just come waltzin' in here like you own the place, thinking you're the baddest. Thinking you can take my spot! Thinking all the cheerleaders are gonna like you! I don't care what you did in that nursery school last year, you're in middle school now and I'm going to be real happy showing you just how bad bad can be. I'll see you at practice, loser." He let go of my shirt before adding a not-so-gentle shove.

The group took Trevor's cue to leave. I got a few hard shoulders as they walked off. Toby lingered for a second. "This year's going to be a lot different from last year. I can't wait." He cackled a little and took off up the stairs.

I stood watching him go, now suddenly alone. As I scrambled around in a meager effort to get my books back together, a poster on the wall caught my attention: THIS IS A BULLY-FREE ZONE!

Great, I thought. Too bad bullies can't read.

Users Review

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